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STYLES AND STYLE IN ART-INDUSTRY.

BY

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If the question arises why the present epoch, both in Architecture and in the productions of art-industry, has no style of its own, the unanimous answer will be because it has too many styles. The overabundance of styles is of itself the cause of our want of style. No former epochs, not even the most degenerate periods in Art-history, have in this respect, been so ill-advised as the present day of enlightenment. What sentences of condemnation have we not of late been accustomed to hear bandied about of the baroque and the rococo! Yet the present time has, least of all, the right to take up the first stone against those sinners. Yet, however far the art-industry and Architecture of those times, for these always go together as having a common aim and destiny, however far they had departed from a sound and natural style, still, what they did produce had within it the germ of an interior conviction which must always be conceded to it. And from this genuine conviction, the works which proceeded from it possessed a life, a force, a permanence which will keep their ground against all declamation, and laugh to scorn all those wonderfully respectable people who are so bitter against all frivolity. The reason is that they are fully imbued with the feeling of the Beautiful of their times, and that they proceed from an artistic freshness which wiss as much penetrated by their own significance as the art of all earlier epochs was by theirs. And how is it with us? At one time we make strictly antique chairs, as much as possible in the most modern style, on which no one can

sit: at another we design a piano in the most conventionalised gothic; at another we admire a silver table service which, destitute of style altogether, runs into all naturalistic caprices. Then we are in ecstasy before a carpet in which the coarsest baroque taste is mixed up with an imitation of nature running through the whole, and before window blinds with moorish arabesques, while the curtains are bordered with antique frets. But why should we enumerate a catalogue of these absurdities, which almost every one laments, but scarcely any one gives up; for every one will have the newest thing in this style, and not remain behindhand in the march of fashion.

Let us rather see how from these absurdities of Art-industry a return can be made to reason and beauty. Hardly by applying to it the same plan which has been proposed for Architecture, namely the mixing up all former styles in an unheard of way, and so obtaining some new deformity, but no new form. We believe that to this carnival of Architecture must quickly succeed a desolate Lent, and that we shall then have to repent very bitterly our wasted powers. And yet, Architecture and the creations of Art-industry are so intimately connected, grow up so entirely from the same soil, that the history of the former coincides immediately with that of the latter. When Architecture flourishes on sound principles, the whole province of Art-industry revives. But what is the position of Architecture in the present day? We must necessarily draw this picture in a few bold strikes before we can proceed any further.

When towards the end of the preceding century Architecture was endeavouring to free itself from the capricious trammels of the last rococo period, it was natural that it should again have recourse to the pure well of the past Grecian epoch. But however clear the stream that flowed from thence, there was with it an unmistakable coldness which might often be said to be frost and nakedness. Only a man of such rare artistic power and feeling as Schinkel could add to the old Hellenistic language new forms which suggest to us later, genuine works of the Grecian intellect. But even Schinkel, with all his Hellenistic preferences did not stop there. In his design for the Building School at Berlin he pointed out a path, both new, and in the best sense of the word natural. Had his indication been everywhere understood and followed up, we should have advanced a good step further than our present standpoint.

But it is never the habit of intellectual development to move forward in a straight line. If human progress moved in a plane it would perhaps have been made to follow a direct line, but the travellers in such a path, where the goal, like a church steeple at the end of a long straight road, constantly mocks the sight, would have found it insufferably tedious. Let us then be content that the path of human development is steep, and that the numberless difficulties of the road must be conquered by many a zigzag. The taste for mediæval architecture and the tendency for its revival led into such zigzag lines. To examine and study them, to turn them to advantage for their own practice was certainly a praiseworthy employment. Would that there had never been, or that there were not now, those who try to engraft the middle-ages on our present times. It is true that they deny it with the most unblushing face, when such an intention is ascribed to them. They say that they let our times run on quietly in their own way, only they would like to give it a mediæval mantle or still more a mediæval cowl. This they maintain, is grand, this the proper national costume, this the Christian livery in which we should clothe ourselves.

How easily is the world allured by the bait of nationality! How splendid to have a national Architecture! Still nationality stands but in the second degree in architectural and art-industry creations. It is the consequence of a unanimous sentiment, of the common citizenship of civilisation for which we are indebted to Christianity. Unto the thirteenth century both ecclesiastical and secular buildings, as well as vessels for either sacred or profane uses, were in the whole of the eastern Christian world executed in Romanesque style: from that time to the sixteenth century in Gothic, and since then in Renaissance with all its later charges. The popular taste of the time was always in these matters stronger than the national perception, which could only be brought out with certain comparatively subordinate variations of the fundamental subjectmatter.

It may perhaps be objected, that all this is well known and that it is of no use to speak of it. But we maintain that it is far from useless, so long at least

as we are cajoled by flourishing the national banner as the only correct one of mediæval times, to accept it as the true national one. Let churches and their appointments be constructed in any mediæval style: the more the form of ecclesiastical approaches the mediæval, the more will the mediæval artistic form be appreciated. The propaganda which, more openly in catholic countries, more secretly in the reformed, seeks to bring back the world to such a goal with gentle but firm hand, will every where inscribe on its banner the mediæval and especially the Gothic style. Whoever will, may follow it: it is nothing to us. We have only to do with the needs of modern civilisation, and must inquire what forms of art are most in harmony with the demands of our present circumstances.

It can indeed hardly be necessary to raise this question any longer. The greatest artists of Christian times, Brunellesco, Bramante, Michael Angelo, Raphael have already given an answer to it, an answer which still meets our eyes in their incomparable works. They went back to the old world-ruling art of the Romans, because they felt that it gave a perfectly beautiful solution to every demand of life. And moreover they developed this art in the sense, and according to the necessities of their times, and found, in its buildings with their complete appointments, with all their vessels, their furniture and in short with their whole apparatus of life, the form of expression for the civilisation of their times, as true as it was beautiful. This civilisation however was fundamentally rooted in the idea that it released the world from the mediæval dominion of the church, and made it take its stand on the ground of acquaintance with and inquiry after truth. Let us simply ask ourselves whether our times are more in harmony with the middle ages, and their ossified traditions, or with the Renaissance, its spirit of inquiry into the essence of things, and its constant endeavours to discover and unveil the phenomena of nature. For us the answer cannot be doubtful. Whoever can find delight in the mediæval narrowness we will not keep him from it. On the contrary, he who is of the same opinion with us that it is the task of our times to seize upon the intellectual inheritance of the Renaissance, which has so often been decried and inveighed against by opposers of modern enlightenment, and to complete its programme in every way, he will also allow that the starting point for our architectural and art-industry creations is beyond all others the style of the Renaissance. How popular indeed this style is may best be seen in its churches. In Italy, in France and in most others countries it is the extensive, light and elegant buildings of the Renaissance before which the masses chiefly stand in mute admiration; it is the splendid altars of its time before which they bend in deepest devotion; it is even the large radiating monstrances of the rococo epoch that they most admire. Without drawing from hence any inference as to the artistic value of these works we only cursorily hold out these observations in opposition to the pretensions of the amateurs of the Gothic, who boast of their art as the one preeminently popular, preeminently attractive to the masses.

But this is by the way. The ecclesiastical needs of our time, whether real or pretended shall not occupy us. Our times are not specially ecclesiastical like the middle ages, but particularly secular like the times of the Renaissance and old Rome. The necessities of secular life, whether of a public or private nature stand preeminent. But these have never been so extensively attended to as to art as in those two great epochs. This is by far not so apparent in the middle ages, for the entire artistic style of that period even in the secular buildings is pervaded by the ecclesiastical influence. And this is in direct harmony with periods in which the whole life was infected with ecclesiastical tendencies. Of the present time this can assuredly not be maintained; the utmost that can be said is that a party exists which would be glad to see it brought back again.

But in the middle ages the ordinary life of individuals was not such as to make them desire, or attempt much artistic display. The comfort of domestic life is now, thanks to the progress of civilisation, much more generally sought for, and this necessity finds its most satisfactory solution in the style of the Renaissance. Where can we see such charming, such elegant and such comfortable arrangements of a residence as in the buildings of that period? I do not speak only of those grand palaces of Florence and Siena, or the majestic edifices of Rome, or the ornamental buildings of Venice or the magnificent splendours of Genoa. There exists in Florence, Pienza, Montepulciano, Siena and elsewhere a number of smaller dwellinghouses, in Tuscany more especially, the most delicious country houses and cottages of that period: in England, Germany and France there are still small châteaux, simple burghers' houses of every kind and every degree, in which the Renaissance, including in its programme some of the favourite ideas of the Middle ages, as for example the oriel or bay-window, gained for them a wonderfully attractive expression for the comforts of private life. Especially is Alsatia still rich in private houses of this kind, as is also southern Germany, and above all Nuremberg.

If we go through art-industry productions what riches of the most pleasing creations does the Renaissance offer! Even the iron work of the courtgate, of the lantern holders outside it and the folding doors carved in noble foliage and figures, with the panelling of the walls, the stuccoing and painting of the roofs, to the minutest detail, display an abundance of the richest and most artistic fancy. Nor must we forget the carved chests and cabinets, the sideboards and dressers, and in short the whole department of furniture. The later Renaissance, having in this department adopted the curved line as the typical form of their compositions, has turned it to the best account for the demands of comfort and elegance. Nothing can be more absurd than to hear a determined partisan of the Gothic, lolling in a comfortable modern armchair, sipping his tea out of a cup of Meissner porcelain, or drinking a glass of Rhine wine out of a Venetian goblet, inveighing against the Renaissance and vaunting the excellence of the Gothic. In revenge

give him a Gothic chair, and compel him, all his life, to sit on its hard and angular form, and do penance for his favourite theory. It is of no use to reproach us for not being so hardy as our forefathers, for being too wedded to comfort. For good or evil we are so, and our Gothomaniac, if we may use the term, no less so than the rest. If we come now to the subject of vases, we find in the Renaissance an admirable variety of forms of richness of decoration. There is however a certain arbitrariness of execution and fantastic choice of forms in the productions of the most intelligent masters of their art, which has so much the more disturbing effect, as in no department does the eye of the artist suffer from abnormal forms as in this. For in none are the laws of form which are consequent on the destination of the vessel, the material and the style of treatment, so strict and limited. But here as in other cases, we have together with the excesses of the Renaissance, a remedy close at hand. There are the antique vases of clay, marble and brass from which especially much may be learnt as to their legitimate development and articulation, England and France have notably in modern times struck out this the only right path with great success. Here then it will be the place to speak of the more delicate parts, the commencing, connecting, closing and crowning members, which antique art has so intelligently applied both to architectural works and to the productions of art-industry. This architectural form of expression is in itself eternal, because it is the distinct and true utterance of what is the necessary, and legitimate outflow from the very being of the object in unsurpassable delicacy and beauty. Indeed in the Gothic, these classical forms can find no place, but the mediæval and especially the Gothic style, was just particularly unhappy in its vessel forms. For, instead of developing the form out of the nature of the object, it for the most part, and in the most pretentious cases, tyrannically exercised a one sided, and misunderstood architectonic law. The goblets, ciboria, monstrances, chalices, in the form of small buildings, or at least terminated in pyramids and turrets and crowned with pinnacles, the execution of which is so ornamental, the construction so consistent in all its parts, notwithstanding their splendid technic, offend all the principles of true art. We saw but lately in an illustrated journal, the representation of a prize goblet designed by one of our first gothic artists. It represented a mediæval castle with turrets, parapets and all kinds of defensive works, finishing off in lightly pierced church architecture with tracery, gablets, pinnacles, and elaborate canopy work. A thing more utterly out of all taste, and more antagonistic to all that is correct and beautiful can scarcely be conceived. It may be seen from hence, how dry is the eternal and almost solitary fountain from which the Gothic draws its detail of surface ornament, that systematic attachment to geometrical figures, which however brings into the fullest expression the fragile, crystalline nature of this style.

On the other hand the Renaissance cannot be acquitted of offence against the laws of ornamentation. In

her correct endeavour to introduce into her works the whole kingdom of vegetable and animal life, she not unfrequently heaps together the most anomalous things, emblems, masks and antique fables, so that not only is all interior connection and sensible relation wanting, but mere caprice is sometimes carried away into absurdities. Ought we then to imitate these faults, and not rather acknowledge and endeavour to avoid them? God forbid that we should become at last such senseless imitators of the Renaissance as some few who here and there have passed from thence into the gravest philhellenic stiffness. Such a one lately, in all seriousness, designed a door in strict Grecian, not to say hieratic style, without suspecting that he was simply offering as something new a dead and stuffed specimen of the art of the Empire. Through such a door the newly revived art-industry can assuredly not enter on its path; rather let us write as a warning over its miserable cornice »Lasciate ogni speranza.«

We need not remark that in all the creations of art-industry, as well as in those of Architecture, the fundamental principle of their form is derived in the first place from their practical destination, from the nature of their material, and from the properties which the treatment of it is to bring out. But with this we only obtain expediency and not always beauty. To lay down a Canon for this latter purpose, we must turn first of all to the Renaissance. It is the expression of a high degree of cultivation, the inheritance of which is the characteristic of our time, and for the perfection of which all our efforts should be directed. Next to it, the whole province of antiquity comes in as a helpmate. In many cases this will even stand first, especially where it has produced forms which meet our present needs. We have

already spoken of the antique vases, and with equal justice can we appeal to their goldsmiths' works. I have never been able to pass before modern jewellers' shops without a feeling of irritation at the poverty of their ideas, the ordinary nature of their forms, their degenerate naturalism. Only when I reached Rome did I really become acquainted with goldworks, as I stood entranced for hours before the windows of the Via Condotti and in the shop of Castellani. He it was, who first observed the beauty of the old metal ornaments as they are found in the Vatican, in the Campagna collection and elsewhere, in the collections at Munich for example. He then began to work in the same style, and the other jewellers of Rome soon followed his steps. Hence the Roman ornaments are, in the dead sheen of the pure gold, in their nobleness of form, their intelligent symbolism, their delicate articulation and filigree work, in comparison with the most modern manufacturers, as the true aristocracy of mankind is to the upstart parvenus.

Our architectonic productions have in many points found their way back to the safe road of Italian Renaissance. If we do but found our art-industry productions on this style of art, without blindly imitating it, but proceeding from the ground of reality, and taking counsel of the laws of beauty which exist in antique works, then assuredly shall we impart to our present cultivated life its truest and most beautiful expression. Frequently as the more exterior, the captivating and sometimes the pretentious may for a time triumph, still after all it is only the really true and beautiful which will obtain a lasting victory. And only thus can art-industry maintain itself honourably and successfully in the commerce of the world.